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Evening Encounter

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Evening Encounter

-Sacrifice Cliff, above Billings, Montana

I cannot say what
brought me to this edge
from the distant streets below, where the moon
dimmed by the lights,
tangles in telephone wires. I look down
on the shadowy nighthawks circling
above the smashed Ford Coupe
at the bottom, and envy
those old warriors, the two who rode
their ponies into the air
off this cliff, a last
attempt to appease whatever
was killing their families
with smallpox.

What a clean break, I think. One plunge and all
the world is purged. But when I turn
and meet them, standing again, they seem
to reproach me,
their ribs sticking out like quills.
Pale grey in the glow
of the city below, their mouths gape
as if trying
to explain how the earth
abandoned their ponies' hooves,
and the rocks far below
grew toward them,
like scabs from the ground.

Mervin Mecklenburg